THE OINVĀRA PERIOD—A GOLDEN AGE IN THE HISTORY OF MITHILĀ

By

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The Oinvāras who succeeded the Karṇāṭas in 1324 A.D. were Brāhmaṇas hailing from village Oini near Pusa Road in the district of Darbhanga. Kāmeshwara Ṭhākura, the founder of the dynasty was the Prime Minister of the last Karṇāṭa ruler Harisiṁhadeo. In 1324, Sultan Ghyasuddin Tughlak of Delhi on return from Bengal invaded the territory of Mithilā. Harisiṁhadeo faced him boldly. Being defeated the Rājā with his army marched into the forest of Nepal and occupied possession over the whole of the Nepal Valley. The Sultan then appointed Kāmeshvara Ṭhākura the ruler of Mithilā which by this time came to be known as Tirhut.[1] Kāmeshvara Ṭhākura was succeeded by his son Rājā Bhogishvara and Bhogīshvara was succeeded by his son Rājā Gaṇeshvara. Rājā Kirti Siṁha immortalised by the world renowned poet Vidyāpati in his famous work '*Kīrttilatā*' was the son and successor of Rājā Gaṅeshvara. Kīrti Siṁha sought the help of Sultan Ibrahim Shah, the Sirki Sultan of Jaunpur in crushing the rising of the Muslim chiefs of Tirhut. In the '*Kīrttilatā*' Vidyāpati has depicted a beautiful picture of his visit to Jaunpur. He died after a short reign and was succeeded by Bhavasiṁha who could rule only for a few years. Since Kīrti Siṁha and his brother Bhava Siṁha both died childless, the throne of Tirhut passed over to their uncle Deo Siṁha. He was very old at the time of his accession to the throne. So his son the crown prince Shivasiṁha was made the real administrator. Shiva declared Mithilā independent of the Sharki yoke. The Sultan invaded Mithilā. While the war was going on Deo Siṁha expired making room for succession of the crown prince to the throne. Shiva boldly faced his enemies and defeating them in a series of battles performed the śrāddha ceremony of his father in a befitting manner (1412-13 A.D.).[2]

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1 S. N. Singh, *History of Tirhut.*

2 अनलरंध्र कर लक्खन नरबए, एक समुद्द कर अगिनि ससी।
चैतकारि छठि जेठा मिलिओ बार बेटप्पए जाउ लसी।
देवसिह जस पुटवीं छड़िऊ अद्धासन सुरराए सरु।
डहू सुरुतान नींदे अबे सोअऊ तपन हीन जग तीमिरे भरु।
देखहु ओ पृथिवी के राजा पौरुख माझ पुन्न बलिओ।
सतबले गंगा मिलित कलेवर देवसिह सुरपुर चलिऔ॥
एक दिस सकल जबन बल चलिओ ओका दिसि से जमराय चरु।
दुअओ दलहि मनोरथ पूरेओ गरुअ दाप सिवसिह करु।
सुरतरु कुसुम घालि दिसि इरेओ, दुहुहि सुंदर साद धरु।
वीर छत्र देखन को कारन सुरजन सते गगन भरु॥

Now he contracted friendship with Rājā Gaṇesh who having killed the grandson of Ajam Shah had become the ruler of Bengal.[3] Sultan Ibrahim Shah invaded Bengal in 1414 A.D. Shiva came to the help of Raja Gaṇesh and defeated the army of the Sultan. Rājā Gaṇesh made peace with the Sultan. The Sultan with a view to wreaking vengeance on Shivasiṁha invaded Mithilā. Shivasiṁha fought bravely and was killed in the battlefield. Rānī Lakhimā with females in the royal household sought shelter at Rāj Banauli in the court of Rājā Purāditya, the Dronvāra Brāhmaṇa Rājā of Saptari in Nepal. Vidyāpati accompanied them. Lawlessness prevailed in Mithilā for about a dozen of years and Sultan Ibrahim Shah was forced to declare Padma Siṁha, the younger brother of Shivasiṁha the ruler of Mithilā. Padma Siṁha ruled for a few years and was succeeded by his wife Viśvāsa Devī. After the death of Viśvāsa Devī the Crown passed over to Hari Siṁha, a posthumous son of Raja Bhava Siṁha by his third wife. Darpa Nārāyaṇa who succeeded Hari Siṁha died making room for the succession of Dhīra Siṁha. He was succeeded by his brother Harinārāyaṇa popularly known as Bhairava Siṁha. The ruins of the palace of Harinārāyaṇa have been excavated near Pandaul, N.E. Rly. Station in Darbhanga district. He was succeeded by his younger brother Chandra Nārāyaṇa who was succeeded by his first wife the renowned scholar Rānī Lakhimā Thakurāin.[4] Rānī Lakhimā was succeeded by Rūpanārāyaṇa Rāmabhadra. Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa alias Ripu Kaṁsa Nārāyaṇa, the last of the Oinvāra rulers, expired in 1549-50.[5] The successors of Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa could not maintain their supremacy over Mithilā. The State broke into pieces and the territory owned by Oinvaras was confined to a number of villages around and the capital 'Sugāon' which till late continued to be in their possession in the form of Zamindari.

अरिभिअ अंतेठ्ठि महामख राजसूय असमेध जहाँ ।
पंडित घर आचार बखानिअ जाचक काँ घर दान कहाँ ।।
विज्जाबई कविवर एहु गावए मानव मन आनंद भएओ ।।
सिंहासन सिवसिंह वईट्ठो उच्छवे वैरस बिसरि गएओ ।।

—विद्यापति

[3] यो गोडेश्वर गज्जनेश्वर रणक्षोणीषु—
लब्ध्वा यशोदिक्कांता चयकुंतलेषु जयते कुन्दस्रजा मास्वदम् ।
तस्य श्री शिवसिंह देव नृपते बिप्र प्रियस्याज्ञया ग्रंथं ग्रंथिल
दंडनीति विषये विद्यापतिव्यतिनोत ।।

—पुरुष-परीक्षा (विद्यापति)

शौर्य्यार्विजित गौड्ड गञ्जन महीपालो पनग्रीकृता नेकोत्तुगं मतंग गजाश्व
कनकच्छात्राभि रामो दयः ।

—शैवसर्वस्वसार (विद्यापति)

[4] This statement lacks corroborative evidence. On the other hand, Mithilā-tradition and literary evidences clearly suggest that Lakhimā was the beloved queen of king Śivasiṁha, and not of Candranārāyaṇa (cf. Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, chap.VI; R. K. Choudhary's paper, "The Oinavāras of Mithilā" in *JBRS*, vol. xl, 1954). Vidyāpati has, in his poems, referred to them at numerous places. [*Editor*].

[5] The date should be c. 1530 A.D. and not 1549-50 A.D. (cf. *Ibid*) [*Editor*].

Development of Sanskrit Literature

The Oinvāra rulers were mostly great scholars and very fond of learning. Having received royal patronage different branches of Sanskrit literature developed to the fullest extent. The poet Vidyāpati Ṭhākura was a minister and the chief court scholar of Shiva Siṁha. Besides his popular songs in Maithilī he compiled in Sanskrit the *Varsha Kritya* the *Bhūparikramā*, the *Durgābhakti Taraṅgiṇī*, the *Dāna Vakyāvali*, the *Purusha Parīkshā*, the *Gaṅgā Vākyāvali*, the *Vibhāgasāra*, the *Saiva Sarvasva*. Pakshadhara Miśra was a boyhood friend of the poet. Jaideva was the original name of Pakshadhara. It is in this name that he composed his famous dramatic work '*Prasanna Rāghava*'. His commentary '*Āloka*' on Gaṅgeshopādhāya's '*Tattvachintāmaṇi*' is considered to be the original work on the Navya system of Hindu philosophy. Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma the renowned Naiyāyika of Nawadwip was his classmate and Raghunātha Śiromaṇi was his chief pupil. It was Raghunātha Śiromaṇi who introduced the Navya Nyāya system in Bengal. Pakshadhar's uncle Hari Miśra who was also his preceptor and the preceptor of Vidyāpati was the greatest Naiyāyika of the age. Unfortunately his works are not available to us these days. It was during the Oinvāra period that Śaṁkar Miśra, a descendent of the renowned grammarian Baruruchi, was born at Sarisaw-Pahitola, a village in the Darbhanga district. Mahāmahopādhyāya Bhavanātha Miśra, father of Śaṁkara, never sought favour from anybody in life and so he is still being remembered as 'Ayāchī Miśra'. Amongst the works of Śaṁkara the *Vaisheshika Sūtropaskar*, the *Anumāna Chintāmaṇi Mayūshah*, the *Gauri-Digamber Prahasan*, the *Bhedaratna*, the *Kantakoddhara*, the *Rasārṇava*, the *Vādi-Vinoda* and the *Chandoganhnik* are masterpieces. It is said
शंकर वाचस्पत्यौ शंकरवाचास्पति सदृशौ। पक्षधर प्रतिपक्षी लक्षी भूतो न च क्वापि।"

The love of Shivasimha for literature has immortalised him in the hearts of Maithilī speaking people. Even children are heard repeating the saying

"पोखरि रजोखरि श्रौर सब पोखरा राजा शिवसिंह श्रौर सब छोकरा।"

In the name of Siṁha Bhūpāla he compiled *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, the *Vyākhyā Saṅgīta* and the *Rasārṇava Sudhāra*. Rājā Harinārayan alias Bhairavasiṁha, one of the successors of Rājā Shiva Siṁha invited all the scholars of Mithilā to some ceremonial function in the Royal household. It is said that Naiyāyikas assembled on the occasion numbered one thousand.[6] Śrī Dattopādhyaya, the author of the '*Sapta Padārthika*', flourished in the fourteenth century A.D. Vardhamānopādhyāya who installed the image of God Shiva at Deokuliādham in Darbhanga district compiled the *Smriti Paribhāsha*, the *Kiraṇāvali Prakāsha* and the *Gayā Paddhati*. All his works on Dharmashāstra are of great importance. Mahāmattak (Prime Minister) Gaṇeshvara, a fore-father of Poet Vidyāpati, compiled in the fourteenth century A.D. the *Dāna Ratnākara*, the *Vivāha Ratnākar*, the *Śrāddha Ratnākara*,

[6] This grand conference of Naiyāyikas is said to have been held under the patronage of Rānī Viśvāsa Devī [*Editor*].

the *Vyavahāra Ratnākara.*[7] Mahāmahopādhyāya Govind Ṭhākura at the request of the mother of Mammaṭa Bhaṭta, the author of *'Kāvya Prakāsha'* wrote his famous commentary *'Pradīpa'* on the book. He hailed from village Bhatsimar in Darbhanga district. Mahāmahopādhyāya Keśava Miśra who belonged to the Oinvara Royal family by the side of his mother is the author of famous books on Dharmashāstra the *Dvaita Parishishṭa*, the *Sāṁkhya Parimāṇa* and the *Tārābhāshya.* It is he who has decried Vidyāpati for having begged grant of villages from the ruler.[8] Mahāmahopādhyāya Kalyāṇadharā's *'Sushlist Parishiṣṭa'* is a commentary on the *'Dvaita Parishisṭa'*. His pupil Murāri Miśra II compiled the *'Śubhakarma Nirṇaya'* which is still being held in high esteem. The *'Āchāra Viveka'*, the *'Prāyaśchitta Viveka'* and the *'Prāyaschitta Sulphani'* by Sulphani Upādhyāya are also of high importance. The *'Āloka Parishiṣṭa'* and the *'Tattvachintāmaṇi'* by Devanatha Upādhyāya of the same period are by no means of less importance. Mahāmahopādhyāya Ruchipati Upādhyāya who flourished during the period wrote commentary on the *'Anargha Rāghava'*. Mahāmahopādhyāya Indramaṇi Ṭhākura, the author of the *Mīmāṁsā-Rasā-Pallava* flourished in the fifteenth century A.D. It was during this period that the well-known Jyotishāchārya Madhusūdana wrote his famous book on astrology the *'Jyotisha Pradipaṅkara'*. Madhusūdana Ṭhākura compiled the *Kaṇṭakoddhāra*, the *Samaya-Pradīpa-Jīrṇoddhāra*, the *Tattvachintāmaṇyāloka* and the *Dvaita Nirṇaya Jirnoddhāra.*"

Rānī Lakhimā, the well-known scholar and for some time the ruler of Mithilā is the compiler of the famous books on Nyāya *Padārtha Chandra* and the *'Nyāya Chandra'*. The author of the book *'Vāṇibhūshaṇa'* on Sanskrit Prosody Mahāmahopādhyāya Dāmodara Miśra was a court scholar of Rājā Kīrti Siṁha and Ratnapāṇi Ṭhākura, the author of the *'Kāvya Darpaṇa,'* a commentary on the *'Kāvya Prakāsha'* adorned the court of Rājā Shivasiṁha. His son Ravi Ṭhākura also wrote a commentary on the said book under caption, the *'Madhumati'*.

The well known poet Gaṅgānanda flourished in the sixteenth century A.D. He wrote the *Kāvya Bhūshaṇa*, the *Kavya Ḍākinī*, the *Śriṅgāra Vanamālā* and the *Bhriṅga Dūta*. Keshava Miśra II compiled the *Alaṅkāra Shekhara*, the *Alaṅkāra Sarvasva* and the *Kāvyaratna*. All throughout his life he enjoyed the patronage of Rājā Manirchand of Kangara. Poet Baṭeshwar Jhā wrote commentary on the drama, the *'Mudrā Rākshasa'* in the fifteenth century A.D. Bhikshu, the author of the *Vivadachandra* and the *Padārtha Chandra*,[9] Vāsudeva Miśra, the famous commentator on the *Nyāya-Saṁgha Tattva Chintāmaṇi'* and Ruchidatta, the well known commentary writer were his contemporaries. Bhīmopādhyāya, who wrote commentaries on the *Gītā Śaṁkara*, the *Kritya Darpaṇa* and the *Kumāra*

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[7] The author of these *Ratnākaras* was Caṇḍeśvara, the Prīme-minister of the last Karṇāṭa ruler, Harisiṃhadeva, and not Gaṇeśvara.—[*Editor*]

[8] लुब्ध नगरयाचक

[9] The author of *Vivāda-candra* was Mīsaru Miśra and not one Bhikṣu. The book is already published. [*Editor*]

Sambhava and Makalopādhyāya, the author of the *'Satranja Prabandha'* and a renowned astrologer also flourished in this century. It was during this century that the famous book on astrology called the *'Nīlakaṇṭhi'* was compiled by Mahāmahopādhyāya Nilakaṇṭha Jhā who was granted the Zagir of Parganna Jakhalpur in the district of Darbhanga.

The Growth of Maithilī Literature

Rājā Shivasiṁha and Rājā Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa, the two of the Oinvāra rulers although great scholars of Sanskrit gave due encouragement to the growth of the local language, Maithilī. Vidyāpati compiled his famous work the *Kīrttilatā* and composed his immortal songs. Shivasiṁha in names of Siṁha Bhūpāla and Nripa Siṁha composed verses in Maithilī also[10]. Govinda Dāsa who is considered to be next to Vidyāpati adorned the court of Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa alias Ripu Kaṁsa Nārāyaṇa. Like Shivasiṁha Lakshmī Nārāyaṇa also composed verses in Maithilī[11]. Mahāmahopādhyāya Umāpati Upādhyāya who composed the first Maithilī drama the *Pārijātaharaṇa* belonged to village Koilakh in the district of Darbhanga and flourished during this period.

Conclusion

Oinvāra ruled over Mithilā from 1324 A.D. to 1530. During this period of two centuries Mithilā progressed rapidly in the field of literature both classical and vernacular. All the branches of Sanskrit learning attained perfection and most of the notable books were compiled during this period. Maithilī having received state patronage also developed satisfactorily. It is for these reasons that this period is described as the golden age in the history of Mithilā.

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10 माँसे पखें उगय कलानिधि लइये सकल निज साज ।
तुअ मुख सम नहिं देखिय तैं खिन मने गुनि लाज ।।
कहदतु कओन पुरुष धनि, जाहि करि रह अनुराग ।
के अछि एहि महीतल, जे अरजस एहन भाग ।।
सामर चामर निंदय, कोमल केस कलाप ।
भौंह मनोहर कर करुष, काम तेजल सरचाप ।।
पवन चलित नव पल्लव, कुचकोरक तरे काँप ।।
धक धाओल नहिं पाओल, आसा लुबुधललाम ।
एहन रमनि 'नृपसिंह' कह, हरहिं निकट पए सोम ।।—राजा शिवसिंह

11 कुंदन कनक कन्हाई, हमहुँ कसौटी तूल ।
निज हिय कसल बालम गुन, बूझल बहु सूल ।।
ए सखि सुपह समागम, सुख कहई न जाय ।
मन कर मनाओ न छाड़िय, राखिय हिय लाय ।।
पुरुष गौरि हमें पूजली, पूने परिनत नेह ।।
जीव एक कए मानल की जओ दूई रहे ।।
लक्ष्मीनारायन नृप कह, तोहे गुनपति नारि ।
जासौ नते बढावत, सैह देव मुरारि ।।—राजा लक्ष्मीनारायण